

## Teaching Statement

The first class in RTF 346 begins with two questions – name a well-edited film and what would you like to get from this class. The first question, of course, is a trick. The best editing is almost always unperceived. After a few moments of puzzlement, students generally name a beautiful and recognized film. The answer to the second is usually a desire to learn specific editing software and “get faster at it.” The contradiction between the answers is obvious. Getting fast at using professional software does not make one into even a remotely decent editor.

By the next class they are asked to count the cuts in a film or television program, real time for twenty minutes, and observe their own reactions. These cuts or visual displacements occur on average every five seconds. Students begin to train their eyes and lose count as they begin to respond to the story. I use this exercise to stress that most of what they will learn in editing classes is how to make their editing invisible.

Why is it that the change from extreme long shot to close up is unnoticed while a slight shift jars the viewer? We talk about all the many reasons, from language to psychology to perception, and end with the concept of motivation. From this point we move to examples of Walter Murch’s rules of a good cut using examples from Murch’s *Unbearable Lightness of Being*. I then re-edit the scenes to demonstrate violations of his rules.

I describe these opening editing classes in detail because they are based in a philosophy of teaching that is developmental, participatory, contextual, integrates knowledge, and demands imagination.

If we approach a film as a world, then in editing (narrative and documentary) and in documentary production, we rethink that world; we recreate it to provoke the truth. And our basis is the good common sense that we share with our audience.

When I teach, I feel as though I’m repaying a huge debt to the remarkable teachers I had as a young adult. I was Paul Falkenburg’s production assistant and assistant editor for three years. Falkenburg was the editor/writer of Fritz Lang’s *M*. He was an inventor of forms and genres and a magical editor. He was also a huge procrastinator, thought of in the field as “the surgeon of the editing room,” and “a no nonsense old-timer.” I once watched him edit a complex film about the humanities for McGraw-Hill from start to finish without making a single mistake. I developed ideas of all kinds, learned my craft, became technically competent, and I learned how to learn.

Paul Falkenburg hired Marian Kraft to edit a film about architect Louis Kahn. I became her assistant. Kraft, a refugee from Nazi Germany, was one of the first women to break into the industry. I had studied editing with her at the School of Visual Arts, but that experience was nothing compared to working for her in the field. Marion Kraft never made a physical edit. She marked the cut point with grease pencil and I worked with a synchronizer and squawk box to assemble the reels. She was a master editor who demonstrated motivation and instinct with every cut. She worked in a more focused and concentrated

form and for longer periods of time than anyone I have ever known. From her, I learned what it feels like to edit.

That mentored sense of technical competence, attention to craft and expressive quality, and an overall non-formulaic, imaginative, and intuitive approach to material has informed my objectives as a teacher. I want students to find their voice and to have the ability to speak clearly with understanding and power.

The details of my approach have changed over the years – particularly since what I perceive as damage to human relationships because of the necessary Covid shut-down and increased stresses in higher ed across the country. The demands of the last three years have, at times, felt overwhelming. This includes many more students in need of accommodations. By way of example, one graduate student was profoundly deaf and not only needed changes to all class materials but also affected my teaching methodology which includes demonstration, spontaneity, and experimentation. Another had extreme sensitivity to sound levels, fluctuation of light, and social interaction. Finally, I felt the impact of Covid on my ability to sense student confusion or boredom; I had to redesign most of the class materials in this production class; and the resources for many students was much diminished. I would encourage an admissions policy which informs staff and faculty about any needed accommodations as far in advance as possible, and information and discussion of specific approaches to teaching with the Office of Disability and Access. I look forward to a relaxed and happy class environment in the future.

I plan to continue a teaching approach that is based on project-based learning, independent inquiry, and a safe, non-competitive classroom environment where students can speak freely and work with each other. This semester I will design and (with the help of our excellent staff) mount two new exercises. I will continue to require students to work together to review each other's work, for all to engage in every class, and to respect and cooperate with each other. I will bring in an assistant editor to offer insight about current employment and needed skills in entry level positions. I will continue to use my own current practice to be on top of new techniques, software, and ideas. Finally, I hope to relax stress by having clear expectations but still allow room for mistakes and experimentation without penalty.

We have more than enough people in the field that can push buttons and imitate stylistic forms without much content. I hope that in my own practice of the ancient art of teaching, I inspire creative and critical thought, hard work and commitment, and the production of beautiful meaningful films.